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SONG OF THE SEA.

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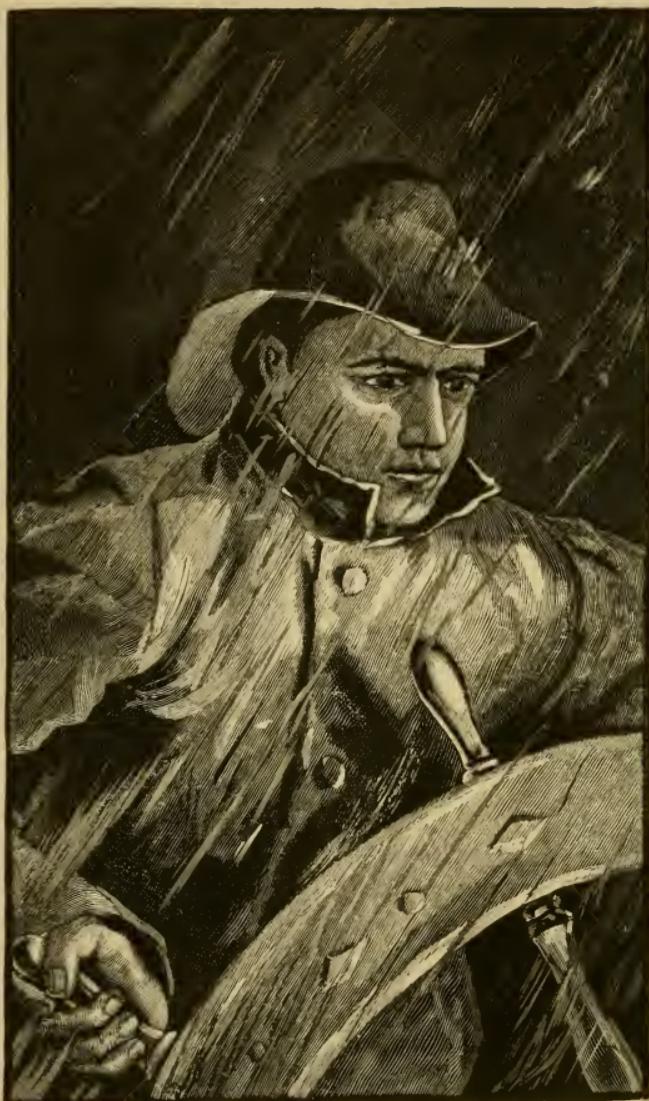
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MIDNIGHT, OFF CAPE HORN.

SONG OF THE SEA.

FROM

THE LOG-BOOK OF A TRUANT
SOPHOMORE.

BY
WARREN HOLDEN,

AUTHOR OF "FOURTEEN SONNETS."



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SONG OF THE SEA.

SONNET.

THOUGH born and bred an inland mountain-boy,
Who never heard thy fascinating roar,
Nor wandered lonely by the winding shore
To watch thy breakers leaping in their joy;
Yet such a one thy witchcraft can decoy
To break away from home's familiar door,
Thy vague, mysterious pathways to explore,
And dare the deep, which lures but to destroy.
Resistless charmer of untoward youth,
That fain would burst the bounds of due restraint,
Thou art the fancied refuge of the free.
Would that thy siren song were spun of truth,
Nor trust betrayed e'er wakened piteous plaint,
Thou softly smiling, yet perfidious sea.

AN EPISODE OF COLLEGE DAYS.

My beloved one, farewell ! From the masterful
 spell
All vainly I strive to be free ;
My impetuous soul, illy brooking control,
 Would commune with the like-minded sea.
Forgive, gentle heart, though in pain we must
 part,
And trust me, I'll haste back to thee.

The anchor's weighed, and gayly down the bay,
With sails unfurled, birdlike we wing our way.
And now we range the unrestricted main,
Where rigid ceremony slacks the rein.

The chafing spirit here has room to breathe,
Far from the crowd where rival envies seethe.

On the wide-spreading sea all is open and free,
Ring out a spontaneous glee ;
'Mid formalities groping, let old folk be moping,
The boundless and lawless for me.

The sun retiring from the sky's blue tent
To his bridal chamber of the sea, unbent,
Around him draws soft evening's crimson veil.
Anon the stars begin their vigil pale.

The stiffening breeze warns us to shorten sail,
And make all snug to outride a threatening gale.
The green-hand scrambles up aloft in haste,
With zeal improvident his wind to waste ;
And, clinging closely to the rigging there,
Presents a comic picture of despair.
He asks the nearest seaman what to do.
“ D—n you, hold on, and that’s enough for you.”
The main-to’gallant sail at length is furled,
When down he tumbles to a safer world ;
Proud of the feat, with brain a little twirled,
And, growing sea-sick, sprawls about the deck,
Careless for life or death,—a human wreck.
If only home, he’d bid the sea good-night.
The seasoned tar laughs at his sorry plight.

Oh, rest thee, my baby, thy brother it may be
Is roughly rocked by the billow.
Thy hammock is breezy, thy pillow is easy ;
He’s tossed on a restless pillow.

The tempest of the gulf-stream takes command,
Whose domineering will naught can withstand,
The lurid heavens blaze from pole to pole
With rending lightnings, and the deafening roll
Of sevenfold thunders shake the stoutest soul.
'Twixt phosphorescent sea and lightning's ire,
We seem suspended in a globe of fire;
The conscious sinner sinks to his knees to pray,
While innocence admires the grand display.

By the bright kitchen-fire, the old gray-headed
sire,

With the children around his knee,
Tells over the tale of the spendthrift gale
That squandered his fortunes at sea.

The joyous cry is heard of land ahead.
The Cape Verde Islands from their watery bed
Rise green and beautiful in many a dome.
Sailing between their shores we think of home.

Will he ever turn back on his prodigal track,—
The quidnuncs thus query their kind,—
And recover the pearl, the unrivalled girl
He so carelessly cast behind?

Nearing the Line a whisper gathers head
Of mystic rites due to old Neptune dread.
Each novice whets his knife significant.
Said rites postponed; discreet and complaisant.

Old Neptune he was the god of the sea,
And old seamen acknowledged his sway;
But the landsmen they refused to obey,
And old Neptune had nothing to say.

A fearsome pestilence stalks 'cross the deck.
One after one obeys the spectre's beck,

And prostrate falls; till many victims yield
To the fell reaper of death's harvest-field.
Their souls, bright jewels, stud the night's blue
shield.

We trust their empty caskets to the deep;
There may the gentle mermaids watch and weep.

In the Sunday-school, with the gentlest rule,
She gathers the lambs of the fold;
But her pondering heart will wander apart
To the ocean forbidding and cold.

Distant the Falklands, like huge icebergs, gleam,
Grim giants barring our free course they seem.
On nearer view, like childhood's frightful ghost,
They are transformed to friendly finger-post.

The albatross a sailing in our wake,
With cruel snares, upon the deck, we take ;
Their floundering efforts on the wing to rise
Make vulgar sport for rude, unpitying eyes.
Two we released, but one we killed and ate,—
Sad omen of Golconda's coming fate.*

'Tis the Christmas-tide. By the ingle-side
The merry song goes round,
And we are not there, in the revel to share ;
Here revelling winds resound.

The stormy Cape we encounter wide-awake ;
Full thirty days his buffettings we take.
Keen sleet and pelting hail our faces blotch,
Nor sun nor star relieves our lonely watch ;
While to the helmsman through the pitch-dark
night

The binnacle supplies a feeble light.

* Note A.

With loss of sail and spar, weathering the storm,
At length Pacific gales our bosoms warm.
Next dawn, low on the horizon land we spy.
'Tis but a bank of wind the old salts cry.
But clearer light reveals a rock-bound shore,—
Out of our reckoning a degree or more.
"Bout ship!" out rang the startled captain's yell.
The wind was light, eastward the tidal swell.
With bare sea-room we escaped the hap to tell.

In a shady nook, by a purling brook,
A girl on a book doth pore;
And she turneth pale as she readeth a tale
Of a wreck on a rock-girt shore.

We ride at anchor on the quiet bay.
In semicircle round us where we lay
Spurs of the Andes to the water slope,
Vine-clad and flower-besprinkled, waking hope

Of peace and plenty at their highest tide.
But man, alas! at lowest ebb doth bide;
Yet gayety attends his lowly lot.
Impartial heaven! none of thy waifs forgot.

We've Irish John, black John, and English John,
Whose pulqueries for sailors lead the ton.
The song and dance and wine go freely round,
Till Jack, poor sinner, anchors on the ground.
A toilsome task to gather up the crew,
And get them safe on board in season due.

Dame Nature you see is chock-full of glee,
And she dandles her boy on her knee;
But the boy, if too free, caught in bad company,
A disgrace to his good dame will be.

Wild cries awake us to a vision dire,—
A home-bound whale-ship wrapped in robes of
fire.

Tons of sperm candles in one blaze unite,
As if the lovely landscape but to light.
A fortune vanished in that splendid sight.
Each whaleman lost his labor with his lay,
But hopes for better luck another day.

If we lose or we lend or a spreeing we spend,
Over spilt milk we never will cry ;
But we'll ship with new pluck, and whatever our
luck,
We'll keep a stiff lip and dry eye.
When homeward-bound we caught Cape Horn
asleep,
With cautious haste around his walls we creep ;
Scarce past his castle gate the giant woke
And gave us chase with wrath that meant no joke.
Ten days we scudded under close-reefed sail ;
Level the snow was driven before the gale ;
At every lurch we shipped a heavy sea
Which swept the decks. All hands alert must be

To save themselfe by prompt and nimble spring
On bulwark, wheel, boat, capstan, any thing.
Things not made fast out at the gangway passed.
The fury of the gale was spent at last.

Full many a crew had occasion to rue
The grum giant's o'er-free interview ;
But we gave him the slip in our tight little ship,
And we left him his anger to chew.

We hailed a loaded fruiter off Brazil ;
Of luscious oranges each had his fill.
After hardtack and old mahogany beef,
A feast for princes,—ranking us the chief.

While becalmed on our path we indulged in a bath
In a large enough bath-tub for all ;
When a tramp of a shark came and joined in
the lark,
We discovered the tub was too small.

Bread in the locker running rather short,
We made Bermuda, as the nearest port ;
Barely escaping hidden coral reefs,
Whose peris would have solaced all our griefs.

Nearing home, dear home ! O'er the ocean's foam
Never more from thy side will I roam.
I come, love, I come, and my tongue is all dumb ;
With repentance my heart burdensome.

“ Land-ho !” the lookout cries. My native land !
Though a bare bank it be of barren sand,
’Tis still my own, my dear, my native land.
There all my hopes like faithful lovers stand,
And patient wait on love’s revered command.

Old sea, farewell ! With thee I love to dwell.
But other tender loves my bosom swell,
And I must say a sad and last farewell !

DEATH OF JACK LEWIS.*

MAD winds and waves, bold mutineers,
Amid whose strife we flounder,
Be still while we are drowned in tears,
Lest here we doubly founder.
Let Zephyr gently waft and tell
Our grief, which deep and true is,
While here we take the last farewell
Of our shipmate, Jack Lewis.

* Note B.

Our gallant bark had crossed the Line
When Jack forgot his blitheness ;
His laughing eye refused to shine,
His limbs soon lost their litteness.
Although the fever raged so high,
He uttered not a murmur ;
And as the stroke of death drew nigh
His courage grew the firmer.

We gently smoothed his restless bed
To soothe the dying rover.
He thanked our care, but frankly said,—
“ I guess my day is over.”
But patient hope still bade us wait,
And faithful hearts upbore him ;
Nor would they yield to envious fate
Till death’s cold wave rolled o’er him.

The day our noble comrade went
The water-wraith was railing;
The dismal winds a chorus lent,
His luckless fate bewailing.
Eight bells were struck. It was his knell !
For then he was departing.
On Friday this ill-luck befell,
Eight Fridays from our starting.

We launched his body in the deep;
No coffin to protect him.
Ye mermaids watch his last long sleep,
Lest evil charms infect him.
One hasty prayer was all we said,
We buried him unshriven;
Yet we believe our worthy dead
Shall loom aloft forgiven.

Simple of heart and true was he,
Good-natured, free, and mellow;
Yet prompt and fearless as could be;
He was a right good fellow.
May Heaven give rest unto his soul,
His body never rested.
Ere boyhood's freedom brooks control
Keen hardships he had breasted.

Now, messmates, one and all, take heed,
And cherish his example;
And never let his memory bleed,
Nor lubbers on it trample.
And never let his spirit grieve
That strife among us few is;
For here we take the last sad leave
Of our shipmate, Jack Lewis.

BOAT SONG.*

ROLLING waves, heaving sea,
Bearing my rollicking boat and me,
Rolling free, over the sea.

Dancing boat, gayly rove
Over the waters to one that I love;
Gayly float, dancing boat.

Playful spray, laughing wave,
Lashing me lightly my limbs to lave,
Sportive play, sparkling spray.

* Note C.

Wave thy wings, welcome wind,
Waft me along, leaving care behind,
Whistling shrill, work thy will.

Swelling breeze, blow away,
Booming the billows and dashing the spray,
Have thy way, none say thee nay.

Blow a gale, blaring blast,
Rending the sail while I cling to the mast,
Risking wreck, game to the last.

THE PLOUGHMAN OF THE DEEP.

A PLOUGHBOY o'er his native hills,

He whistled merrily.

A shepherd by the mountain rills,

His heart was full of glee.

The dewy lips of blushing dawn

Would kiss him with a smile ;

Sad eve, with curtains chastely drawn,

Would oft his tears beguile.

He watched those curtains' changeful hue
Like dying dolphins shed,
Till dark and darker as it grew
Proclaimed the dolphins dead.

Bright maiden forms of fairy-land
Danced round him while he slept;
He longed to clasp some kindred hand,
And wondered, loved, and wept.

He dreamed of an enchanted isle
That Neptune's bosom graced.
Seduced by such alluring wile
He tempts the watery waste.

An ocean ploughboy now he braves
To plough the liquid plain.
His flocks are now the fleecy waves
Which roam the desert main.

Whilom upon the mountain brow
He watched his playful sheep ;
Now round him seated on the prow
The rampant billows leap.

Whilom with team of humble breed
He ploughed with patient zeal ;
The wingèd wind is now his steed,
His plough the sharp-edged keel.

His bread upon the waters cast
To sow the briny soil ;
Poor ploughman, may he reap at last
A harvest for his toil.

What though the tempest rudely rock
The cradle of the wave,
Its nursling learns to bide the shock
Which soon he loves to brave.

He hath renounced his land of birth,
His parent streams denied,
With all the ties of mother-earth,
To wed the ocean bride.

And well he loves that ocean bride.
Pillowed upon her breast,
He feels the pulses of the tide,
Whose throbings never rest.

And oft she greets her jovial groom
With kiss of sparkling spray,
While dancing round in bridal bloom
The laughing billows play.

The solitary of the sea,
Whose vigil knows no end,
Must witness oft while frantically
The elements contend.

Thou Keeper of the storm-winds' cave,
To curb their wrath sublime,
While round their dens they madly rave,
Impatient for their time,

When Thou their prison dost unbar,
Forth rush they wild and fast,
To sweep the waters near and far
With besom of the blast.

Deep calleth to his brother deep,
Waves clap their snow-white hands,
While winds a reign of terror keep
O'er ocean's roaming bands.

The trembling mariner turns pale,
His bark reels to and fro ;
The sport of the unthinking gale,
His spirit melts with woe.

He stretches forth his hands to Thee,
Thou Rider of the storm;
Let Thy right arm his warder be
To guard his naked form.

Thou bid'st the waters, "Peace, be still!"
They shrink at Thy command.
The boiling deep cannot o'erfill
The hollow of Thy hand.

Thou frownest and earth's caverns howl
Beneath Thy dreadful ire.
O'er heaven's face night draws its cowl;
Sea burns a lake of fire.

Thou smilest and the gladsome wave
Returns Thy gracious smile.
The sailor, trusting Thou wilt save,
Forgets his fears awhile.

Cheer up, thou homeless wanderer,
Led captive by the wind ;
Heaven will a favoring gale confer,
A haven thou shalt find.

When comes thy last long “ watch below,”
Oh, calmly may’st thou sleep,
Far down where tempests never blow,
In grottos of the deep :

Until that mighty angel, who
Shall stand on sea and shore,
Awake old ocean’s slumbering crew,
When time shall be no more.

Hark ! tis the great Commander’s cry,
Who stilled the storm so oft,—
“ Ye dwellers of the deep ‘ stand by
To take your ‘ watch aloft.’ ”

OCEAN.

My heart still roves the world-wide sea,
Whose paths in wayward youth I trod,
Communing with sublimity,
Alone with nature and with God.

Oh, human heart, unfathomed deep,
Where high resolve and passion strong
In doubt momentous struggle keep,
Now firm with right, now bold with wrong;

With the mad sea thy life compare,
To its vast mirror bare thy breast ;
Stern as the storm, roused from its lair,
Thy naked grandeur stands confessed ;

Or let the wind, that spurns control,
Truce to the wave reluctant yield ;
An image of thy changeful soul
In native beauty lies revealed.

A prairie spread from pole to pole,
For waving green are waves of blue,
Which bud and blossom as they roll
With sparkling foam of diamond hue.

Nor lack there herds to roam the plain :
Than prairie steeds more wild and fleet,—
The untamed winds that scour the main,
Trampling whole navies 'neath their feet.

There, 'mid the watery wilderness,
Where Solitude, the hermit, dwells,
A stern novitiate gains access
To nature's inmost citadels.

To timid landsmen all unknown,
A world of terrors undefined ;
Thine unveiled glories are not shown
To eyes which fear hath stricken blind.

Only undaunted spirits dare
The splendors of thine august court,
Where genii of the upper air
And demons of the deep resort,

When nature holds high festival,
And all her subject-powers invites
To muster in her presence-hall
And celebrate her mystic rites.

Of those dread rites and what they mean
The secret key was never told ;
They may be felt, they may be seen,
But words their power can ne'er unfold.

Weird ocean, with mysterious spell
Inspired the pilgrim leaves thy shrine
Voice-haunted, like thy native shell,
Whose music is a part of thine.

I seem to hear thy hollow roar
As when, in wistful boyhood's day,
I stood upon the lonely shore
And listened to thy solemn lay :

Like some sweet, melancholy strain,
That wakened chords of sympathy,
Whose lingering echo swells again
Through memory's storied gallery.

Loitering upon the shell-paved strand,
Th' encroaching surf my feet would lave ;
While gazing dreamily I scanned
The flow and ebb of many a wave.

They come interminably on,
Like Time's full tide in billows vast ;
How like th' unconscious present gone,
Engulfed in the oblivious past.

Thus came the thronging joys of youth ;
As prodigally thrust aside ;
Till waning waves betrayed the truth,—
Their source was not an ocean tide.

Oh, give me back my boyhood's dreams,
The open heart, the fancy free ;
And, manhood, all thine empty schemes
And anxious wealth are dross to me.

NOTES.

A—Page 14.

Our ship, "The Golconda," sailed from New Bedford on Friday, the 6th of December, 1839. The captain wished to discountenance the superstition about Friday.

But several disasters occurred to us on Fridays, such as the loss of a sail, and the loss of a boat. On the second Friday, Antonio, the Portuguese cook, was taken down with small-pox. On another Friday another was taken. The third severe case was that of Jack Lewis, who died on Friday.

Probably the same motive—the discouragement of superstition—led the captain to permit our sport with the albatross.

Some three months later the ship was lost in a typhoon off the coast of Japan. The author had left the ship at Talcahuana, Chili, and returned home on the "Walter Scott," of Nantucket.

B—Page 20.

This ballad was written immediately after the event, and sung to the tune of "Highland Mary."

C—Page 24.

This song has been set to music by the author.

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